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An Autobiographical Note
by Dr. Dinanath Pathy

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Why can't one take a course on Picasso and do a degree in mechanical engineering and then decide to do a Ph.D. in Mathematics? I have a friend in the US who is a noted surgeon but decided to go to Harvard for doing a Ph.D. in Mathematics after eight years of medical practice. After some years he decided to do MBA and become a consultant afterwards. The whole idea of multi-disciplinary education, multiple careers and flexibility to move is not part of our agenda. When we think of reforming university, we must think of reforming the old paradigm.

Sam Pitroda
(extracts from a speech he delivered at the Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, November 2011)

Making of an Art School: An Autobiographical Note

by Dr. Dinanath Pathy

(Based on the fifth part of my Autobiography Series in Odia Language - *Life Story of an Odia Painter: Making of an Art School*)

Experiments undertaken in a state with a more than two thousand year old temple building tradition beginning with rock-cut elephant Gajottama of 300 BC to the rock-cut caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri, stupas and viharas of Lalitgiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri, temples of Lingaraj, Puri and Konark till the 19th and 20th century murals of Buguda, Kanchili and Sariapalli.

It was in the last lap of the 20th century, the government of Odisha decided to set up an art college in Bhubaneswar and invited me to take over as its Principal and be responsible for its making and growth. As was alleged by a few, I was in fact running an media studio for the Orissa Tourism Development Corporation as its Divisional Manager and considered an 'outsider' to the art education world. I defended myself (also in the court of law) that I was already an art teacher in the Central School for a period of five years and a Curator of Art and Crafts in the Odisha State Museum for more than seven years and these experiences should be enough to prove my credentials to build an art college. To substantiate my defence I claimed to have inherited Anand K. Coomarswamy's legacy that equates a curatorship in a museum with a professorship at a university. In terms of disseminating art education, a museum and a university with an art department are considered equivalent. My critics hardly took note of my defence; they were not even aware that the National Museum, New Delhi had an Art Institute for teaching and research of art. All the same I held fast to my convictions and moved on.

I was more than an 'insider' because with the help of a group of like-minded artists, I had started an art school known as Chitram - the first ever art teaching institute in Bhubaneswar in the late 60s of the past century. It was run by an NGO called Silpi Samsad of which I was the Secretary. I had a strong conviction and, even today, I harbour the same idea that art cannot be taught within the confines of a

classroom and with the help of a curriculam which suffers from now-ness. Therefore, I started holding classes in the precints of the 11th century Brahmeswar Temple, bamboo groves of an ICS Officer Nilamani Senapati and studio of the danseuse Sanjukta and her singer-hunband Raghunath Panigrahi. Utkal University to which my college was affiliated, had prescribed a syllabus dominated by, 19th-century colonial ideas and therefore I devised my own teaching programme and got it printed at my own expenses to be used by my students and the teachers. This syllabus was extremely flexible and holistic in its approach.

You might take me for an autocrat and in fact I was running the show single-handed donning different roles as the principal, lecturer, clerk and chowkidar. I tried to turn the disadvantages into advantages. Only an artists can do this.

My college was inaugurated along with the Bhubaneswar Regional Centre of the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi from the same dais in 1984. As I understood it, the museum, art college and the art academy are parallel institutions which provide alternative pedagogy and supplement each other's efforts. Only because of this, the present seminar and workshop organized by the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi assumes great relevance. I was a member of the Executive Body of the Lalit Kala Akademi and convenor of the Art Education Committee and had fingers on three pies - The Akademi, the College and the Museum. The members of the Akademi, however, were divided in their estimation of the art teaching community. The teachers were looked down upon by the free lancers who thrived on the gallery and the market. The studio supervisors at the Akademi's Regional Centres though were imparting relevant instruction related to their art to artists who used their studios, were reluctant to be labelled as teachers overtly. This was mostly because of a lackadaisical attitude towards the teaching community even though eminent teachers have guided the Akademi till recently.

I wrote letters to the Akademi to permit my college students to use the graphic studio of the Bhubaneswar Regional centre. My request was instantly granted, and while I was the secretary of the Akademi, I wrote to all the Regional Centres to run summer courses in art for housewives instead of keeping these centres idle. Garhi studio conducted art workshops for school children and in collaboration with

CCRT (Centre for Cultural Resources and Training) I motivated school children to visit art exhibitions at the Rabindra Bhavan galleries and I took time out to guide them. As a member of the Akademi, I always felt that I represented the teaching community and, more specifically, my art college. I had planned books for children on contemporary artists and art as European and American museums do to educate the young generation. I had devised art kits for the Contemporary Art Awareness Programme (CAAP) in collaboration with Council for Educational Research and Training) and UGC (University Grants Commission) with the following educational aids:

a) Contemporary graphic prints of eminent artists of India representing various regions of the country.
b) Reproductions /Picture Post Cards / Portfolios for display.
c) Transparencies of artworks for projection.
d) Video casettes with documents on the lives of the artists.
e) Audio casettes containing conversatations and interviews with the artists.
f) Art souvenirs for children.

In collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), an open learning programme in visual art appreciation was planned by the Akademi. The target group for this programme was (a) anybody for self-enrichment (b) artists, art writers, journalists and (c) art / drawing teachers in schools. Minimum entry qualification was ten years of schooling and the major focal area was modern Indian Art since 1850, painting, sculpture, graphics, ceramics, photography and installation. The date of launching was 1997. It was proposed to have a national scope to be reflected in the course development and delivery.

All these proposals had received the Akademi's approval, initial steps had also been taken, but the process could not be carried forward for various reasons. The lack of financial resources was a major hurdle. Even if you go by its nomenclature, Lalit Kala Akademi should position itself at the pivot of art education in the country co-ordinating and guiding activities of bodies who are involved in various ways in promoting art and spreading art education which the Akademi is not doing at the moment

Before submitting art education proposals in the Akademi, I had experimented with them in my college and designed programmes which helped open up my student's eyes to the reality around and to the world art situation. There was no adequate budget provision in the college and therefore I had to depend on contributions by students, parents and commissioned artworks from the Government. The college undertook most of the media designing and publication work of the Odisha Tourism and the college virtually became the tourism department's studio with involvement of teachers and students. It was a kind of vindication of my stand that art education has no limits and a person who was the Divisional Manager of Production and Publicity in the tourism sector could also qualify as the Principal of a college of art.

To make the teaching programme activity-oriented, I started student clubs in the college. There were five / six clubs such as Sketching club, Walking club, Poetry club, Drama and Music club and Sports club. Each club and each teaching department brought out annual publications such as *Drawing* for sketches, *Mudra* for graphic prints, *Image* for a sculpture and *Art and Poetry*. To stimulate intellectual pursuits, the Art-History department published a journal on art and aesthetics titled *Chitra* featuring articles from wellknown authors and teachers. These publications were in addition to several small catalogues which accompanied the exhibitions. I remember I had once presented our graphic department publication *Mudra* that contained original prints of students to Richard Barthlomeow, the then Secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi at his office at Rabindra Bhavan. I still remember the encouraging remarks he gave after subjecting each print to his admiring scrutiny. The college publications helped to build an educational net-work among art colleges in the country and in the long run it helped students.

It was an irony that when we were students at Khalikote Art School, we did not know the importance of stones in making sculptures. We were only acquainted with plaster of paris and cement. We never turned our face around to look at huge stone temples and observe them. For the first time, Prof. Balbir Singh Katt taught our students how to shape a stone in one of the All India Art Teachers' Camp that was sponsored by NCERT. I bring in these small incidents to make you aware how poor modern art education in Odisha was.

Students' confidence in stone was reinforced when eminent sculptors like V.R. Khajuria, Srikhande, S. Kanniappan, S.G. Vidya Shankar Sthapathy, C. Dakhina Moorthy and Anil Kumar came to Bhubaneswar to participate in Lalit Kala Akademi's several camps at the Regional Centre. These camps and workshops provided an extension to our sculpture class rooms. Besides, I took my students along to visit stone- carving workshops in Bhubaneswar. Bhubaneswar alone boasts of hundreds of stone carving workshops and the twin city Cuttack has a number of clay modeling studios. These provided fresh impetus to my students and made them aware how lopsided art education was in Odisha.

I installed a potter's wheel, a kiln to fire terracotta sculptures and created facilities for bronze casting. These could be done with the help of financial resources that I gained from commissioned works Government of Odisha placed with us. It was tough to collect funds for these additional programmes beyond University-approved curriculum and even the government budget for approved programmes was severely limited.

From an all India art teaching perspective, these ventures might sound silly but by the time the earliest college of Art at Khallikote had completed thirty years of its functioning and in spite of the presence of London-trained teachers in the college, the orientation in the teaching programme remained colonial. There were teachers from clay potter's family from Cuttack and stone carver's family from Puri, but their presence was extremely marginal; their work was dubbed as craft and had no impact on the course structure. When we were art students we had not seen a litho press or an etching press and our teacher told us that a drawing on a graph paper was graphic art. One could imagine such a deplorable situation in the only government art college in Odisha. Government of Odisha appointed Prof. B.C. Sanyal, then Vice Chairman of Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi to inspect the Art college and suggest improvements. Prof. Sanyal confided in me that he had submitted a report running to seventy-five typed pages. Many years after this incident we had a rare occasion of having Prof. Sanyal at our Bhubaneswar college for the All India Art Teachers' Camp organized by NCERT and, in a friendly conversation, he wanted to know my art education background and when I answered the obvious – Khallikote, he remarked that my answer could not be true because

someone trained at Khalikote was not in a position to have organized such an all India camp with an eye to artistic sensitivity and professional acumen.

I am convinced that education is itself a creative process and a process of enfoldment of personality and the challenges faced by art education are manifold. An art teacher may not necessarily be an eminent artist of the county (it is much better if he could be such a jewel) but has to be a visionary, a pathfinder and a sensible person with good communication skills. I tried to be one such and my experiences of working in a museum, a school and a tourism organisation helped me to identify the needs of the students and provide them leadership. I believe that a Principal of a college and, for that matter, of any other college and organisation has to function like the manager of a circus and should be capable enough to tame the wild beasts and when occasion demands make an ass gallop like a horse on the tracks. It is like an editor who should have four instead of two hands.

It is the experience that has enriched you and circumstances in which you are placed that teach you how to reorient yourself and rise to the occasion than your degrees and awards. I would like to mention three of my several out reach programmes with community participation. I have understood that art education is a site-specific process and cultural product. Art-education has three basic components: the curriculum, the faculty and the community.

Art schools stand at the threshold of multidisciplinary art research and interdisciplinary art production – not as one more theoretical seminar or "multimedia" studio among stubbornly traditional course offerings or one more state-of the – arts degree, but as the next wave of cultural production. The artists of the twenty-first century may become in some sense Renaissance figure, deploying a panoply of disciplines and media for their work. But we must seek to understand these new patterns of creativity fully in order to explore our notion of historical memory and true experiments beyond Internet shopping for global materials and fabrication technicians.

The first communication project was implemented in the village of Jatni about twenty kilometers from Bhubaneswar where, in the nearby stone quarry, our students were engaged in the month-long stone carving workshop under the mentorship of Prof. Balbir Singh

Katt. A group of female students accompanied by two teachers arrived in the village. I explained the project to the villagers and sought their help in implementing it. Our basic purpose was to explain to the house owner the ritualistic and aesthetic value of the wall paintings and the need for their renewal. We almost invaded their domestic spaces much to the unconcern of the people, but their initial reluctance gave way and slowly they cooperated with the college and we were able to decorate the whole village walls with monochrome floral and geometrical diagrams.

For the second project we selected Shisupala Garh, a settlement of Bhubaneswar with archaeological remains of an ancient fort. Besides our students and teachers we had with us theatre person and painter Asim Basu, a professor of history, Rajendra Prasad Das and his wife, a handicraft designer Chandra Sekhar Rao and a graphic designer Ramahari Jena. This group had better scope and maneuvering capabilities compared to the earlier one and it worked on three / four issues. These were the wall murals, wall mud reliefs and innovative printing on textiles. We had carried with us materials such as textile pieces, wood blocks, ceramic pebbles and colours. We also had the initial reluctance by the college going girls and subsequent unbraided cooperation. It so happened that the entire village enjoyed the work and it provided great amusement to the younger group, specially school boys and girls. When the school classes ran empty, the school teachers rushed in to check what was going and finally they fell in love with the project.

The third project was executed in a village called Junei not far from the temple of Konark. We were on a visit to the temple of Konark and were accompanied by stalwarts like Prof. B.C. Sanyal, Dr. Mula Raj Anand, Srimati Meher Contractor and other participating artists and art teachers of the NCERT All India Art Teachers' Camp who had come from different states of India. While viewing the sculpture of the temple Dr. Anand proposed to visit a local school and on our way back I took them to Junei Upper Primary School. The headmaster of the school was flabbergasted seeing such a host of eminent persons in his school – we entered different class rooms and started talking to students, demonstrated different skills beginning with eloquence to paper craft, mask making and puppets. At the end of the day we had an interactive session with the students and teachers on the school

grounds. The students were open, happy and excited and freely displayed their artistic skills. The headmaster in his thanks giving speech said that it was a red-letter day in the history of the school and the experience was unique.

The three International Exhibition Projects that I could execute with participation of students and teachers represented the climax of sharing teaching and learning experiences. The Government of India appointed me as the Designer and Curator of Popular Art of India exhibition for Festival of India in the erstwhile USSR and Sweden. It was a challenging assignment, nevertheless a prestigious project for me as well as for the college to prove our worth as designers of an international exhibition. For us it was a learning experience which enabled us to identify exhibits, prepare large cloth murals and handle assignments with which the prestige of the country was involved. Students got the chance to move around the country to pick up art objects that I had identified, travelling by air provided rare opportunity to teachers who travelled through the country, One of my students was included in the team that travelled to Stockholm. Similarly, the International Kalinga Bali Yatra Festival at Bali- Indonesia for which we were assigned to visualise and design the festival enriched our experience and enhanced the scope of art education. For students and teachers, the excitement of learning outside the boundaries of art college in a foreign country was new. It also taught us how to sustain ourselves in adverse situations and make innovations and amendment. I remember how the Odishan textiles which were designed by us and displayed along the streets of Bali were snapped up by the Balinese as prized souvenirs much to the embarrassments of a few bureaucrats and to our delight. The third was setting up Odisha pavilion in the India International Trade Fair. The students who were part of the exhibition team had the chance to get acquainted with the contemporary art scene in New Delhi. That was an extension of our school.

Over a decade I built this college. The teaching programme was filled up with several exciting projects from exhibitions to seminars, workshops, lectures and demonstrations mostly undertaken in collaboration with several international, national and state institutions including non-governmental organizations such as the Working Artists Association of Orissa, Orissa Crafts Council and Sunanda Pathy Foundation which served as funding agencies. Such enormous undertakings in the field of

art-education were neverdone before in Odisha. Our teaching patterns were more flexible, innovative and holistic.

The making of an art school had its share of aberrations, too. Such a school is a continuing process, a practical pursuit which could run into difficulties unless one understands its finer aspects. My colleagues failed to understand the inner balance of teaching and learning, nurturing creative experimentation as a normative value than on mastering techniques. The building structure that was planned on an eight petalled lotus diagram rising above from the landscape with a central vista and community spaces at quadrangles later was altered. Unnecessary interferences proved disastrous. The teaching philosophy unless respected is bound to lose direction, the place being its enabler will resist change. The exhibition hall at the base of central vista meant for movement and generation flow was stopped. It therefore lost democratic character and after destroying its virtual spaces, the School now tries to find solace in hybrid lifeless spaces elsewhere.

Education ordinarily presupposes a retreat, or a period of waiting, so as not to burden the students with the distractions and demands of a professionally productive life. The position of apprenticeship that education generally assigns to the student implies a withholding or a deferral of the fullness of practice, which is held out as a promise that can be redeemed once the student proves mastery over the rudiments of a calling. Being someone and learning to be someone, are seen as two distinct moments, with the first following the successful completion of the second. While this may be true generally, it is difficult to sustain art education that merely seeks its posthumous completion in the career of an artist.

There is a process of constant discovery and transformation through art practices. For an artist, there can be no rigid separation between being someone and learning to become someone. This process of discovery needs to be undertaken on daily basis. The horizons of artist's self (I even include students) continuously expand to take in the incremental discovery of what the artist still desires to inscribe on his on her consciousness and the attention of the world.

The meaning of the word school has undergone many transformations. It denotes first "a pursuit of time of leisure" a "forum for discussion" and "a place for learning". It is necessary to dwell on this conflation of

duration (time), gathering (a forum), and site (a place for learning). Of these, time is the most important, because a gathering that does not endure or a place that disallows the transformative, accumulative inscription of exchange and discourse cannot by itself, or even in combination, generate a context of learning. So it is time, the kind of time that can be a vessel and receptacle for reflection – that is central to learning. The current reality of schools and of all other institutions that produce the commodities known as technique and information, have strayed from the original sense of what schooling might have meant.

In making a school *riyaaz* is of utmost significance which should not be lost sight of. In Hindustani music tradition, *riyaaz*, or the daily cultivation of one's musicality, is a repertoire of exercise to keep the voice or fingers or one's ability to play an instrument in good shape. But it is more than this. It is as much about the cultivation of a set of attitudes and sensibilities as it is about the honing of a skill. *Riyaaz* is an attempt to explore the boundaries of what one can do on a regular basis and of pushing these boundaries, again on a regular basis. So that the foundation of one's practice undergo a daily renewal, so that one keeps becoming an adept. *Riyaaz* is a practitioner's meditation on his or her practice. It constitutes a form of meditation, not a formula for practice.

Dinanath Pathy is a practicing painter, writer and art historian. He is the Founder Principal of the B.K. College of Art and Crafts, Bhubaneswar. He was the Secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. Presently he is the Director, Alice Boner Institute Varanasi.

The story of Dinanath Pathy building an art college in the seventies unfolds in Bhubaneswar, a city in transition. There is nothing sudden or dramatic about bringing an institution into existence; It is created brick by brick over a long period of time and yet, in Dinanath's hands, the story of nurturing this college is full of suspense. An otherwise impersonal and bureaucratic city like Bhubaneswar is transformed in this exciting narrative into a theatre in which the vision of an artist confronts apathy and inertia, meanness and jealousy but finally triumphs over them and shapes the minds of a generation of young artists.

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